A close-up photograph of a person's hand with a gold ring on the ring finger, gently touching a wall. The wall has peeling white paint, revealing a rough, textured surface underneath. There are patches of light blue paint on the right side of the wall. The background is dark and out of focus.

And the alley she whitewashed in light blue

A film by Nili Portugali

Synopsis

At a time of existential threat to the physical and human environment we live in, **Architect Nili Portugali** takes us into a deeply intimate journey in the Galilean '**Kabbala**' holy city of Tsefat.

A **childhood journey** that unfolds gradually from her **present holistic / phenomenological / Buddhist / scientific Point of View** (replacing current thoughts and approaches) to a discovery of profound **universal insights** of: What is their secret of all those great **timeless** buildings of the past, cities, villages, tents and temples endowed with **beauty and soul** in which man feels '**at home**', and what is that **One pure 'art of making'** which is thousands of years old that creates them (any the Arts), **at any culture, at any place and at any time**. That, via **reconstructing** in her unique **poetic meditative cinematic language** her childhood memories engraved on each stone of the invisible city's history with cultural heritage of more than 1000 years that no longer exists, and is totally forgotten. The birth place and hometown of her family since early 19th century, where her


grandmother founded her hotel, in a small stone building around a patio at the end of an alley in the old city that no longer exists.

"Using my body of knowledge and experience I have been accumulating in multidisciplinary creative work in the **visual arts; writing and Architecture** as my main profession, the film **both in form and content, explore and cross new boundaries, and straddle the line between art and cinema**".





This is where I felt how a place
endowed with **soul** in which we feel
at home, should 'feel'.

A photograph of a woman in a blue shirt and white apron sitting on a stool in a commercial kitchen, peeling green vegetables. She is surrounded by stainless steel equipment, including large pots, a mixer, and shelves with various kitchen items. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the left, creating a warm, nostalgic atmosphere. The woman is focused on her task, and the kitchen appears to be a place of traditional culinary practice.

Watching my Grandmother - this is
where I absorbed what is the '**One
Timeless Art of Making**' that created
those great places, we want to return to
again and again.

Director's Notes

I am a practicing architect; senior lecturer; researcher and published author.

My multidisciplinary work focuses on both practice and theory, and is tightly connected to the Holistic / Phenomenological school of thought.

A worldview which stands in recent years at the forefront of the scientific discourse as a whole in disciplines like: cosmology, neurobiology, psychology, particle physics, brain sciences, recent theories of complexity, and is in convergence with the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy.

Two worlds to which my work is associated with, apparently underlying the essence of my film.

The film of which I wrote its essay; directed; edited and did the production design can be seen as **the third of a trilogy** following the many buildings I designed and the published books I wrote and illustrated.

Milestones

My curiosity about what lies at the foundation of that organic architecture endowed with beauty and soul which has the enormous power to excite us, the one that makes us

feel '**at home**' and want to return to again and again, and my willing to understand the process – the '**art of making**' by which these buildings / artifacts / paintings were created, started at my first year student of architecture.

A search which continued through my studies at the A.A school of Architecture (London) ; my post graduate studies in architecture and Buddhist philosophy at U.C. Berkeley ; my research work with Architect Prof. Christopher Alexander at the 'Center for Environmental Structure' (Berkeley) and finally my acquaintance with Buddhism.

After inspired by **Scientists and Buddhist scholars** that guided my ongoing work , and while reaching the summit of my journey-the temple of the Dalai Lama at the time I also started to think about making my film, I realized, that in this journey I was, and the answers to these questions I was searching for I already got. There, in my childhood, at the **Galilee 'Kabbala' holy city of Tsefat** - birth place and hometown of my family since early 19th century, where my grandmother Rivka founded her hotel, in a small stone building around a patio at the end of an alley in the old city - my own temple. In that patio was her home together with the guests until the day she died.



The hotel was the whole world,
days passed without realizing
that I haven't gone outside it.

This is where I felt how a place endowed with soul, in which we feel '**at home**', should 'feel', and what is that '**One Timeless Art of Making**' adopted by my Grandmother when

whitewashing the Alley in light blue. A way which is thousands of years old that created those great cities, villages, tents and temples, we want to return to again and again!



The world we live in is made for People


The purpose of architecture, as I see it, is first and foremost to create a **human environment for human beings**. Nevertheless, modern society has lost site of the central value-the human being, and created an environment in which there is a feeling of alienation between man and place, devoid of any emotion.

Buildings affect our lives and the fate of the physical environment in which we live over the course of many years, and therefore their real test is the **test of time**. The fine old buildings where man feels '**at home**', we always want to return to are the ones that touch our hearts and have the power to release feelings. Although this timeless quality exists in buildings in different places, rooted in different cultures and traditions, the experience they generate is similar and **common to all people**, no matter where or from what culture they come from.

Hence Architect Christopher Alexander's basic assumption was that behind this quality, which he calls '**The quality without a name**' lies a universal and eternal element reflecting innate Patterns that are printed in our mind from the outset thus common to us all as **human beings**.

In order to change the feeling of the environment and create places and buildings that we really feel '**at home**', what is needed is not a change of style, fashion or personal vision of the creator but an adaptation of **a new worldview-a holistic** and cross-cultural one that will transform the worldview underlying current thought and approaches, being an existential threat to the physical and human environment in which we live. **This is what the film is about.**



A photograph of a woman in a black dress standing in front of a white wall. To her left is a large window with green shutters. Below the window is a small green metal gate. To her right is a white door with a small arched window. The wall is white and shows some signs of wear and peeling paint. The scene is brightly lit, casting shadows on the wall.

At the foundation of all those places
in which man feels at home,
are absolute **physical patterns**,
that have always been responsible for the
dialogue between man and environment
to the 'feeling' and beauty of a place.

The building is born not created

A building must grow organically out of the visible and hidden 'voices' of the place on which it is built.

The Dalai Lama writes in his book: "When searching for the meaning of truth, we search for reality itself.

And in order to be in touch with the way things actually exist, we need to choose a process of awareness and alertness, **releasing us from any factor interfering the clarity of the mind.**"



The cinematic language - a subtle interplay between image and sound

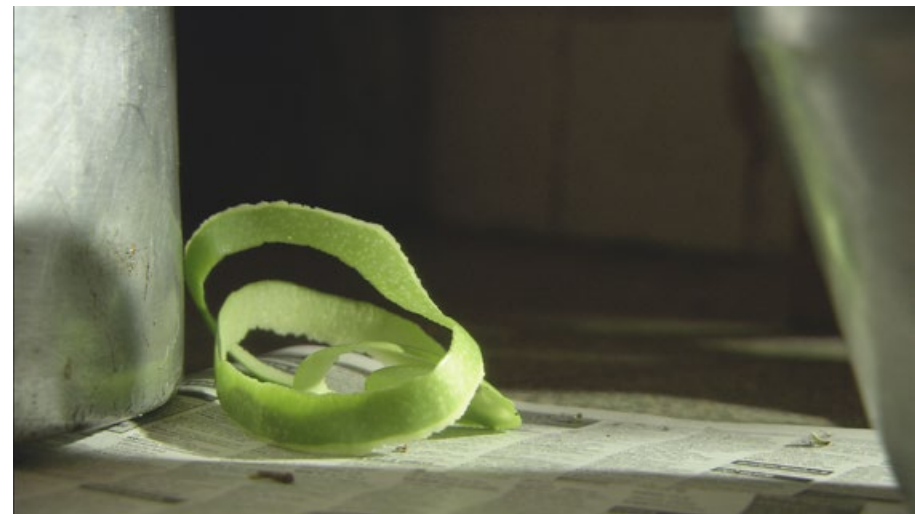
My multidisciplinary creative experience allows me to confidently state that there is no essential difference between designing a town square; a building; a chair; a layout of a book; or a film.

For what makes a town square or a building a place we want to return to again and again, or what gives a book a long shelf life, or what makes a film **Timeless** one is the fact that they all create a deep **emotional** experience.

Moreover the same set of rules which determines the correct relationship between the **parts and the whole** and gives the sense of unity-harmony in architecture, applies in its abstract definition to anything consisting of matter, form and color, on any level of scale. These foundations of harmony I tried to apply in the film.

Assuming that all Art which is **Timeless** is one which takes you **beyond words and**, similar to the poetic structure of Japanese poetry (**Haiku**) in which the essence of the events are conveyed through minimum words, my main challenge in this film was how to convey the central theme of the film - rather abstract issues - not through dialogues but through the visuals (being fascinated by such films as *The Turin Horse* / *Béla Tarr*; *Le Quattro volte* / *Michelangelo Frammartino*; *The Naked Island* / *kaneto Shindo*).

So only occasionally at scenes where the images alone were not sufficient enough to 'do the job' coherently, soft touches of cryptic voiceover reinforced them. Allowing the viewers to sense, absorb and contemplate silently of what they **see**.





Grandmother did not need to travel
to 'Zen Centers' worldwide,
to practice a state of 'controlling the
mind' and being '**free of the self**'
she did it daily, absentmindedly

The structure

The film is not a story driven or a linear 'plot' but a coherent **essay** presenting via poetic cinematic language abstract assumptions about the secret concealed within the beauty of all those Timeless places in which man feels **'at Home'**. Unfolded piecemeal through extended intimate scenes along the time axis of the 6 holidays in which I as a child visited my Grandmother in Tsefat. The summer holiday; the High Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashanah; Yom Kippur; Sukkoth; Passover) and winter. Similar in structure to the Korean movie 'spring; summer; fall; winter'.

The story line

The story line in this film is the **subtext**, while the narrative

nodes (childhood memories) appear in the background.

The film is not about the biography but about the **activities!** of the characters - about a **process of creation** in which the boundaries between art, philosophy and the creator's 'religious mission' are blurred - a process that brings the creators to **enlightenment**.

Sound

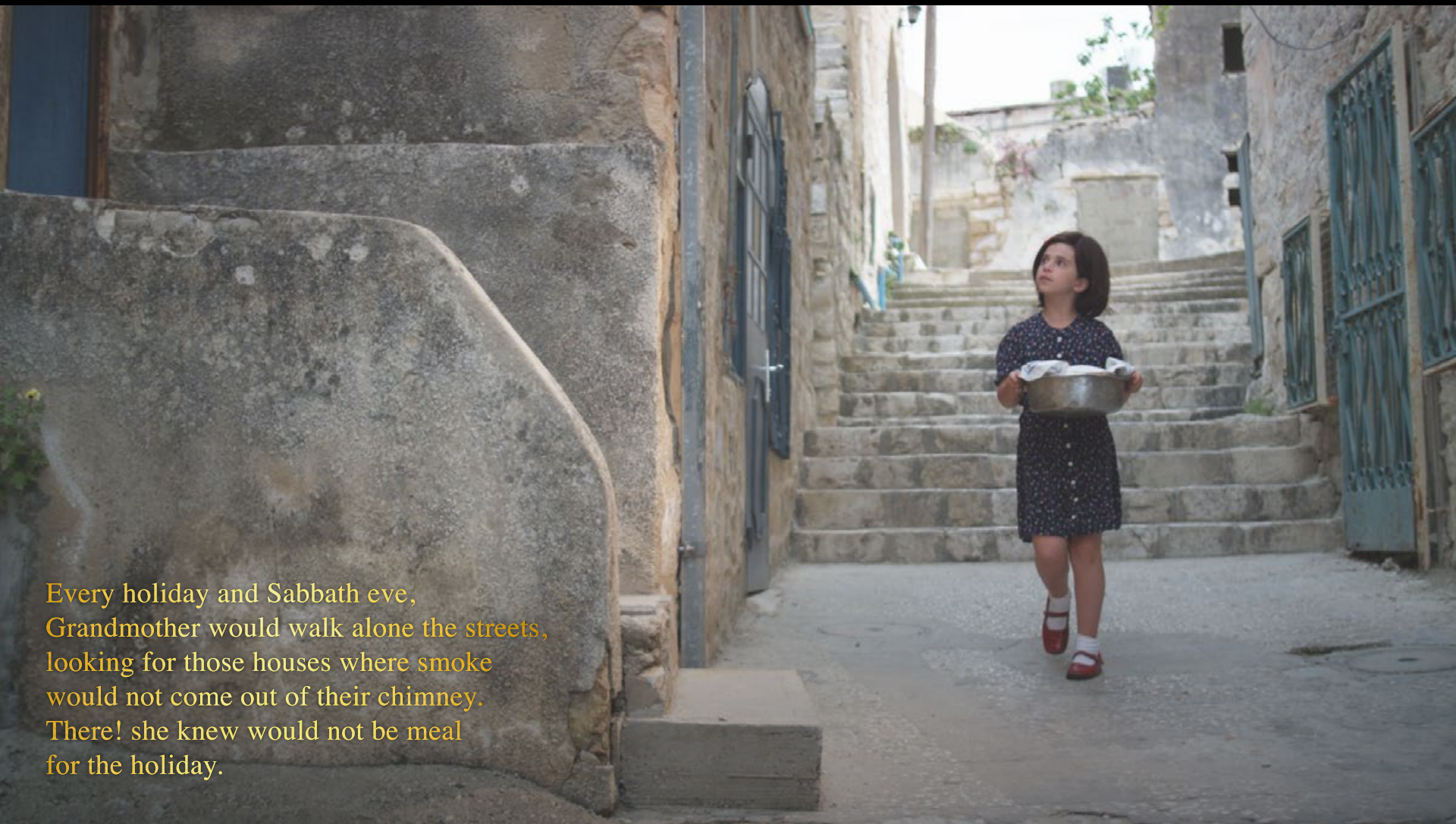
The sounds are not just reflections of reality, but foremost a tool to reinforce the subtext itself interwoven in the visual elements. Moreover, it is used as a tool for associating different scenes along the film that though appear different in form manifest the **same /common underlying patterns**.





Late at night, while the guests
were dancing in the living room,
Grandmother prepared them breakfast

Every holiday and Sabbath eve,
Grandmother would walk alone the streets,
looking for those houses where smoke
would not come out of their chimney.
There! she knew would not be meal
for the holiday.



The Other characters

The alleys; the buildings; the stone; the peeling plaster; the light blue; the kitchen; the pots is not a background backdrop or an arbitrary shooting locations for the human activities, **they are central characters** in this essay film.

The Camera is focusing on all those architectural details, textures and colors that I absorbed and **breathed** in my childhood in Tsefat.

Moreover, The wholeness and beauty of these small details

are not an ornamental for its own sake, but perceived in the film, the way I perceive the details in the building I design. **They are the structural elements creating the whole - the contextual creator of this film.**

This was understood by Grandmother when Hand embroidering the white flowers on the pink napkin for her guests; or when sprinkling sesame flowers on the rolls she prepared for Sabbath.





The Invisible City of Tsefat

Tsefat is one of the four Holy cities in Israel since the 'Second Temple'. Thousands of Jewish scholars, prominent mystics: masters of religious law; liturgical poetry and 'Kabbala', who were expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 16th century, found in here refuge, turning the city into the most important spiritual center of the Jewish community in Israel. Here Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai wrote the book of 'Zohar'- the most important text of 'Kabbala', here Rabbi Joseph Karo wrote 'Shulchan Aruch' – the code of laws, and here settled the Holy Ha'Ari with his disciples. Tsefat 'old Jewish community' was unique. Here Orthodox Jews, who adopted the Liberal Worldview and religious tolerance, lived side by side in harmony with the secular and the artists who were charmed by its beauty.

But for me Tsefat, is the alleys through which Grandmother walked, and the plastered stone walls that Grandmother's hand has touched, and the place where six generations of my family were born and buried alongside the graves of the righteous. Grandmother's story is the story of the last generation of the '**elders of Tsefat**' who have carried on their shoulders more than 1000 years of history of a city with cultural heritage that **no longer exist and is totally forgotten.**

The light blue

The mystic doctrine of the Kabala to which includes various interpretations to the nature of divinity and the work of creation, mysticism, reincarnation and the like – has undoubtedly influenced the city of Tsefat's unique physical structure. The light blue color is one of the colors of the 'Zohar', which according to Kabala **connects us to the heavenly and purifies us.** This is the color my grandmother used to whitewash the walls of the alley of her hotel every Passover. This is also the color seen on the houses of Tsefat and on the graves of it's righteous.



The Dalai Lama writes in his book:
"Every entity comes into existence
in- dependence on other factors and conditions.
Therefor they are impermanent!.
They don't remain forever,
they continually disintegrate."

And if we just want to get close
to the Center of the 'One Timeless Way'
that Grandmother was connected to,
It ! will lead us to create cities, villages, streets
and buildings in which man will feel at home.
In any place, in any culture, and at any time.





Director's biography

Nili Portugali is a well-known practicing Architect; senior lecturer; researcher and published author.

Her multidisciplinary work both in practice and theory is closely connected to the holistic-phenomenological school of thought.

She is 7th generation descendant of a family living in the holly 'Kabbala' city of Tsefat, Israel since the early 19th century.

She was a senior lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem and at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion, Haifa.

She is a Guest lecturer at MIT, Harvard, Carleton University, Oxford University, TU Stuttgart; TU Dresden; TU Delft, Tsinghua University China.

Her first book: *The Act of Creation and The Spirit of A Place/ A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture/ Edition Axel Menges Stuttgart/London* was listed in **the books of the year** by the Royal Institute of British Architects (R.I.B.A).

In the book Review by *URBAN DESIGN International* / Palgrave Macmillan Journals it was written:

Cinematographer's biography

Boaz Yehonatan Yaakov

Among his Award-winning films: '**AJAMI**' - Academy Award Film Nominee (**shortlist**) for Best Foreign Language Film; '**MY FATHER MY LORD**'; '**RESTORATION**'; '**DR. PPMERANZ**' and many more.

"PORTUGALI'S QUIET REVOLUTION MAY BE THE ONE THAT PASSES THE ULTIMATE TEST OF TIME"

Her work is documented in books, in the Dictionair De l'Architerture Du xxe Scielle / Hazan Publication France, in professional journals, in the press and on TV.

Graduated at the A.A. School of Architecture - London; Post G selected studies in Architecture & Buddhism at U.C Berkeley; Film studies at the Tel-Aviv University.

She did research work in the 'Center for Environmental Structure' Berkeley, with Prof. Chris Alexander.

Among the world-known buildings she designed is:

'The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library' at the historic heart of Tel-Aviv.

Her work was exhibited in the Venice Architecture Biennale, Barcelona Spain, Linz Austria, San Paolo Architecture Biennale and more.

The film she directed; edited and did the production design can be seen as the third of a TRILOGY following the buildings she designed as an architect and the published books she wrote.

Ofer Inov

Among his Award-winning films: '**BEAUFORT**' Silver Bear Winner in Berlin Film Festival; Academy Award Film Nominee (**shortlist**) for Best Foreign Language Film; '**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GOD**'; '**HAIU LEILOT**' and many more.

Credits

Written and directed by: Nili Portugali

Cinematography: Boaz Yehonatan Yaakov;
Ofer Inov

Editing: Nili Portugali

Online Editor: Yoav Raz

Sound Design & Mix: Itzik Cohen

Music Selection & Editing: Nili Portugali

Production Designer: Nili Portugali

Artistic Advisor: Sigal Weiss

Produced by: Nili Portugali

Technical details

Production: Israel

Length: 72 minutes

Format: DCP

Aspect ratio: 1:1, 85

Color

Sound: Surround 5.1

Language: Hebrew

English Subtitles

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